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STRESS PERCEPTION AND SENSATION SEEKING IN PORTUGUESE POLICE OFFICERS INVOLVED IN PEACE KEEPING MISSION IN EAST-TIMOR

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Introduction: Policing is a stressful activity. Police officers must deal with aggressive people, delinquents, and danger, or with victims and citizens asking for help. Often they don't have enough material or human resources and they must decide under stressful conditions. In international peacekeeping missions stressful situations are even more frequent, increased also by hostile reactions of the inhabitants of the country, who sometimes refuse the presence of foreign police forces. Despite those situations, some police officers don't feel stress and show higher sensation seeking, suggesting that personality traits protect from stress.

Aims: Identify levels of stress perception and sensation seeking personality traits in a sample of police officers involved in peace keeping mission in East-Timor, included in United Nations police forces.

Methods: Data were collected using a translation of Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al, 1983) and Sensation Seeking Scale (Zuckerman, 1994), applied to 70 male police officers from portuguese "Guarda Nacional Republicana", after comeback from a peace keeping mission (mean age 31.3 years).

Results: The results reveal that sensation seeking" exists in our sample, confirming that the police officers had a tendency to search for new experiences and adventure. Low levels of emotional exhaustion and low stress perception were identified, and the sample has a high tolerance for boredom.

Conclusions: Personality traits can protect from stress and sensation seeking is typical of some activities, including policing. The knowledge of personality traits can be useful to choose individuals who must deal with stressful situations, such us peace keeping missions.